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Phallic girls of pop: Nicki Minaj's sampled anaconda and the semiotics of contradiction

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'Here's Miley Cyrus riding an inflatable penis on stage' (10 May 2014);^[1] 'Miley Cyrus wears penis nose in concert' (25 Sept 2014). Theatrical gestures like these recall Mediterranean carnival practices as much as the inflatable penises of live concerts by the Rolling Stones (1975) or the Beastie Boys (1987). Rumours of Cyrus's bisexuality in the popular online press were affirmed by her as early as 2013, when she said 'I'm not offended' and that 'it's 2a compliment' to be called a lesbian.^[2] Her stage-play with the penis also recalls the talk of 'Lady Gaga's penis' that raged as rumour and counter-rumour on the internet and TV interviews in 2009-10. Gaga is said to have replied to Barbara Walters that she did not mind the rumour, as she portrays herself in an androgynous way, and 'I love androgyny'.^[3] Prior to either of these popular artists' playful engagement with the penis in full view of the mainstream, the electronic performance artist, Peaches, frequently addressed the penis in her lyrics^[4] as well as 'wearing' it in performances. When asked about her 'penis envy' in a 2007 interview, she replied that she preferred the term 'hermaphrodite envy', since 'there is so much male and female in us all'.^[5] Her backing band is called 'the Herms'; while in the video for 'Dick in the Air' from her 2015 album *Rub*, she and Margaret Cho play around in pink and yellow woolly jumpsuits which incorporate floppy male genitalia.

It was in the context of such post-feminist play with gender identity and sexual ambiguity that I heard Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda' when it came out in the summer of 2014. What struck me was how the song-title couples the snake/penis with *her* name, (rather than that of Sir Mix-a-Lot, whose voice is sampled in the opening 'My anaconda don't...'). And

despite western culture having so often used the snake as a symbol of *female* sexuality in western culture, the fluidity of gender and sexuality is demonstrated by the ease with which this (large) snake becomes symbolic of male sexuality, or the penis, in this song.^[6] My own perception that the song associates Minaj herself with the penis is not unique: the following occurred in a 'humorous' blog of 'Worst songs' from Irkited, who describes himself as a 'young Australian guy who used to be a breakfast DJ':

First of all, in the original song, Sir Mixalot wasn't talking about a snake, he was talking about his penis. Once again this seems to confuse Nicki Minaj as she seems to think she has a penis too. Maybe she does, who am I to judge.^[7]

Such occurrences in popular culture resonate with theoretical metaphors like that of the 'phallic girl' (McRobbie, 2007; 2009), or 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2005), both of which are intended as criticisms of the ways in which women and girls have adopted practices previously seen as masculine in contemporary society. Levy's critique of 'female chauvinist pigs' (2005) seems apt for singers and performers who mimic the phallic 'excesses' of male rock and rap stars, and in the process, as she would argue, objectify themselves and other women along traditional, 'male chauvinist' lines. McRobbie's 'phallic girl' is one of a series of 'luminosities' or 'spaces of attention', whereby government and commerce encourage girls to act out as sexual and consumer agents, on condition that they relinquish all feminist critical thinking and demands. As an alternative to the 'post-feminist masquerade' (of femininity), the phallic girl follows the assumptions of equality in the sexual sphere, pursuing sex as 'recreational' in a way that had previously been reserved for boys/men (McRobbie, 2009: 85). However, McRobbie also argues that this sexual freedom of the phallic girl is the privilege of the 'white female subject', and that while 'licentiousness and bad behaviour' may be endorsed for white girls, for black girls in Britain, 'being drunk and disorderly while also dressed as a prostitute is not a risk worth taking' (ibid: 87). She goes on to argue that it is such norms of black respectability that mean that 'unsurprisingly, expressions of sexual autonomy and enjoyment on the part of young black women tend to be channelled towards black music subcultures such as hip hop' (ibid: 87), or confined to black community activities like Jamaican dance-hall.

This notion that black female sexual expression is somehow pushed underground to subcultural music and spaces seems to me to miss the complexity of ways in which the popular music and dance of black cultures interact with and influence mainstream popular culture, as well as the interplay between cultural representations and everyday/night behaviour in clubs, pubs and streets. McRobbie may be right about what is actually socially acceptable for black and white girls on British streets. However, it is clear that a succession of black, female musicians have pushed the boundaries of 'expressions of sexual autonomy

and enjoyment' throughout popular music history, and if looked at over the last hundred years, it would be somewhat absurd to claim that these performances did not both influence and reflect sexual behaviour in the wider society. In the years since McRobbie first published her article about 'top girls' in 2007, black female musicians in the mainstream of popular music have continued to generate massive controversy over the sexuality of their songs and performances, notably Rihanna ('S&M', 2010), Azealia Banks ('212', 2011), and Nicki Minaj, whose 'Anaconda' (2014) is the subject of this paper. This is not to say that white musicians have not also generated similar controversies, with Lady Gaga, Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus being only three of the most well-known. However, at the risk of producing glib assessments, I would say that both 'Telephone' (Lady Gaga ft. Beyoncé, 2013) and 'I Kissed a Girl' (Katy Perry, 2008) are songs that are narrated from within a one-to-one heterosexual relationship (even if it is refused in 'Telephone', and is transgressed in 'I Kissed a Girl'), while 'Wrecking Ball' (Miley Cyrus, 2013) has conventional lyrics about a break-up.

One of the reasons I have chosen to focus on Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda' is that while pushing boundaries of black female sexual expression, it also breaks decisively with any narrative of romance. The lyrics of the main, rapped verses tell of relationships with two different men, their succession in two verses implying perhaps 'serial monogamy'. This in itself is highly unusual in female-sung popular music, where when women sing about two men, it is generally in a scenario of being 'torn between two lovers', or of 'cheating' in the country music genre. Such triangular dramas of jealousy and desire tend to highlight the necessary focus on 'the one' in the narrative of romance, and are in any case relatively rare in mainstream pop. In addition, in Minaj's song, there is no suggestion of 'love' as the basis of these relationships, which are rather about sex, money, and excitement (guns and drugs). In fact, love is only mentioned in relation to 'sex appeal' ('he love my sex appeal'), being an elaboration of what is 'real' in the relationship – again, far from the normative expectation of 'real love' in romance. She boasts about the phallic sexuality of her ex-boyfriends ('dick bigger than a tower, I ain't talkin' 'bout Eiffel's'), once again appropriating the 'dick' to her own boasts of sexual prowess. There are also ambiguous suggestions in the lyrics of boasting of (her own) multiple sexual partners, which I discuss further below.

In all these ways, the lyrics break with romance, and place Minaj's voice as that of a 'phallic girl', enjoying sex for fun and excitement, and with more than one man. In the video, by contrast, there is not a man in sight, all the sexual activity being between women for the duration of the greater part of the song – through the verses and choruses. There is a break with this in the final scene of the video which acts as a coda to the song, and where Minaj famously does a lap-dance on/for Drake, accompanied by somewhat sinister cackling laughter and images of the singer submerging herself in a steaming, jungle pool in a tight,

'bondage'-type costume. Drake sits in a slump through all this, and when at the end he lifts a hand as if to touch her body from behind, she slaps it and strides away off stage. Reviewers saw this as giving feminist meaning to the video: 'Minaj is the one in control...She's simply expressing her own sexual desire. Her lap dance is an act of seduction not of submission'.^[8] And, putting 'Anaconda' in the context of other Minaj videos ('Looking Ass' and 'The Boys'):

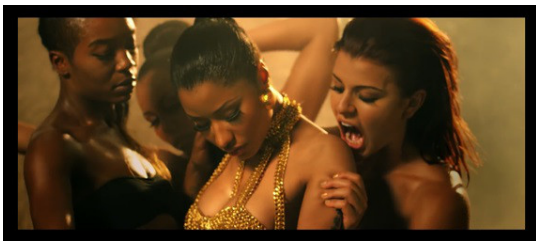
These videos enact a certain bait-and-switch violence toward the viewer who has the audacity to think Nicki is shaking her ass *for him*; they draw you in with their neon-bright, sexually charged imagery, and then they suddenly, unexpectedly turn confrontational. She plays this whole narrative out in miniature in the last part of "Anaconda," (Zoladz, 2014)

While I agree with this assessment, I shall argue further down that this narrative is already contained in the lyrics at the very *opening* of the song. It is an optical illusion to analyse music videos as if they were a series of silent images. Our understanding of them is shaped by the language and music that accompany, and generally precede them.

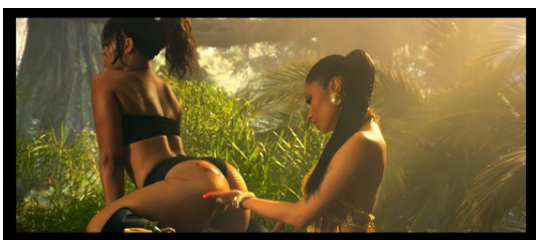
However, as a coda, the heterosexual scene with Drake is outside the main verses of the song, which are accompanied visually by dance scenes between Minaj and four other women. These scenes are intercut between a jungle setting where the women wear black and simulate sexual acts with each other, and a gym setting where the other girls wear mainly white and Minaj wears bright pink as their 'trainer', and they jump around energetically to the beat of the music, this being again intercut with scenes where they appear in formation 'grinding' their hips above/in chairs, and 'humping' the floor, again mainly in white, but with Minaj distinguished by her pink bra. There is a further scene in a kitchen, where Minaj slices bananas and squirts fake cream down her cleavage, which has her in a prominent dark-pink wig, while in the final lap-dance scene she wears black tights/pink bra, this being intercut with the submerging scene where she is in a dark-pink bondage-type swimming costume. Now the splitting of the female singer's persona into black, white and red is a familiar trope in music video, well-known examples being Avril Lavigne's 'Girlfriend' (2007), Britney Spear's 'Toxic' (2004) and her follow-up, 'Womanizer' (2008). At the risk of over-simplifying: if white and black signal the passivity of the old 'virgin/whore' dichotomy, red tends to be used to signal active independence, sometimes called 'quirkiness' when used of women in 'indie' (= independent) culture. In 'Anaconda', there are similar colour demarcations in terms of sexual persona: if the black, jungle scenes play out adult-looking scenes of night-time sexual exploration, the white, gym scenario shows young women 'working-out' their bodies in bright light playfully and energetically – exhibiting them for an audience, but not engaging with each other sexually as in the jungle scenes. The red-wigged, kitchen persona suggests something more quirky and a playful auto-eroticism, referencing jokingly the 'phallic mother', slicing the banana with her castrating knife. The same goes for the red, or dark pink, swimming

costume at the end: here Minaj plays upon the trope of the 'drowned virgin turned whore' (Mazullo, 2001); however, she is *not* drowning, but auto-erotically relishing the water and her own hands on her body. At first, she is self-absorbed with semi-closed eyes, but later she looks the camera/audience in the eye, and addresses them directly as she 'sings along' on the words 'bitches in the motherfucking club' and then in the following line ('fuck you if you skinny bitches'), snapping out the word 'bitches' followed by 'what? Kyuh!'^[9] as if visually 'biting' the audience – the aggression made jokey by a quick fade to a knowing smile.

In terms of overall audience address, the video falls within the scope of the 'female gaze', as set out by Stacey (1987), in that it shows women both looking at other women, and exploring differences between women (or different aspects of persona). The scenes in the jungle allow for the identification of the female viewer with the women dancers' looks of desire, or at any rate, of sexual curiosity, towards each other. There are fleeting, fast-cut looks of aggression, and of simulated intercourse:



as well as the playful focus on the 'butt', or as Freud would have called it, a 'secondary sexual characteristic'^[10]:



The video also allows for the play of fascination with difference that was part of Stacey's concept of the female gaze, in that it intercuts the different aspects of the girl/woman persona – the night-time sexual being, the day-time gym-worker, and the 'quirky' and auto-erotic 'indie' girl. The 'female gaze', here played out as lesbian sex-play is of course fraught with contradiction when enacted in the public sphere of a dominant male gaze (Bradby, 2013), and many female online commenters are uneasy with the way in which the video seems to be objectifying the female 'butt' according to male visual desire, as set out by Sir Mix-a-Lot in

his 1992 track 'Baby Got Back' from which the song is sampled. However, there are also many commenters who find it 'empowering', particularly for black women, and also for larger women. If one looks back at the video for 'Baby Got Back',[11] it is striking how skinny Sir Mix-a-Lot's dancers are compared with Minaj and her dancers in 2014, and somewhat ironic in view of his own lyrics' condemnation of the 'beanpole dames in the magazines', and the 'knock-kneed bimbos' of rock videos. Minaj by contrast has dancers with more flesh, which excites other online commenters to the envious distrust typical of female gazing, accusing her of using silicone.

In an assessment of the video which suggests that, contrary to some critiques, it is possible for female hip-hop artists to subvert and reclaim the negative images around black women's bodies,[12] Jessica Bermass takes us back to the 19th century fetishisation of Sarah Baartman, as 'the Hottentot Venus'. This 'acute historical example of the hyper-sexualisation of black women in the white imagination' (Bermass, 2016: 169) meant that 'Baartman's sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks served as the central image of the black female throughout the nineteenth century' (Gilman, 1985: 213, cited in Bermass, *ibid.*). Now, clearly these events form an important historical backdrop, but they are not necessarily the reference points of hip hop artists and commentators today, who are likely to be more concerned about ongoing statements and 'reply songs' of one kind or another around the topic of 'booty' in African American culture in particular.[13] A fuller discussion of the historical racialisation of the black female body would in any case need to take account of how the Black Bottom became a popular dance at the time of the Shimmy and Charleston in the 1920s, in an appropriation of a stereotyped version of black popular culture by white Europeans and Americans. The dance was denounced by Roman Catholic priests of the Anti-Jazz Movement in Ireland in 1934, who were trying to get all 'jazz' banned,[14] but clearly the reason it was a source of social conflict at that time was because (white) Irish people loved dancing it, and were embodying the moves they imagined as typical of African or African-American people. Similarly, the ongoing theme of 'booty' in songs sung by African-American and Caribbean performers in recent years sets up a modern 'canon' of praise for what is seen as distinctive about black, female bodies. My point is that Minaj's song does not occur in a direct line back to the exhibition of 'the Hottentot Venus' in London in 1810, with a brief reference to Sir Mix-a-Lot's 'Baby Got Back' in 1992. There is an ongoing chain of creation of meaning around the black female body in popular music and culture, which involves exoticisation and racialisation, yes, but also 'reply' statements of affirmation, reclaiming and normalisation. Minaj's song stands out in this chain, as Bermass points out, by 'defying and embodying racially coded erotic ideals simultaneously' (Bermass, 2016: 171). In addition, it is striking that Minaj and the other dancers enact moves in erotic dance (e.g.

'grinding' the floor) that, according to sociological studies, are generally associated with lower social class venues, and with black artists, but also with *masculinity* in dancers (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 113, cited in Bermass, 2016: 8).

However, such 'general associations' (my own phrase) are often derived from interview studies, which try to abstract from social context, and so can only elicit opinions and attitudes, as opposed to the complexity of shifting meanings in the social context of 'naturally occurring' conversations or interactions.^[15] If bodily movements are interpreted as meaningful (e.g. as 'masculine' or 'feminine') within social contexts, then the social context of the music video is, in my opinion, given by the language of the lyrics of the song: in this case, the rapped lyrics of Minaj, as well as the sampled lyrics from Sir Mix-a-Lot, including the white girl-talk that had formed the Intro to his song. However, even in the case of rap music, which is a genre defined by 'rap' as a word for talk, it is still common to find assessments of songs, such as that just cited from Bermass (2016), which concentrate exclusively on the video with no reference at all to the music or language of the song, other than quotation of the title.^[16] While I cannot aim to do justice to all three elements of the track (video, music, lyrics), I attempt in the rest of this paper to somewhat rectify the imbalance by focussing on the lyrics of the song, in particular on the rhythmical aspect of the arrangement of these words as 'rap music'.

It is commonplace to remark that rap is a performance genre: as language, it becomes 'rap' by being spoken out loud, not by being written on the page. Nevertheless, it has much in common with literary poetry: others have pointed to the significance of the internal rhymes of rap (Kajikawa, 2015: 122-3), but I do not know of work that looks at rap from the point of view of the classic analysis of metre. A text of metrical analysis such as Attridge's *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (1982), which looks not only at literary poetry, but also at ballads and nursery rhymes, demonstrates how extremely widespread are binary forms in English-language verse. In addition, his explanation of the ambiguities of 'dipodic' form (Attridge, 1982: 114ff.) seems particularly applicable to rap.

The early anthropology and linguistics of verse and metre focussed a lot on whether binary rhythms and symmetry were a universal feature of children's rhymes across different cultures, and this question has continued to generate new research (Burling, 1966; Brailoiu, 1984; Aroui and Arleo, 2009). For my own purposes, I am more interested in the generalised way in which such binary 'chanter' rhymes and rhythms are used in the early teaching of language to children in anglophone cultures, with screen communication nowadays taking

over the 'adult' role in such teaching. While there is no systematic research on small children's ability to generate binary rhythms, Aroui (2009:8) writes of how he heard a 5-year-old boy in England able to generate his own, chanted 'slogan' in such binary rhythms, repeating over and over:

x		x		x		x	
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
I		want	a	new		ice	cream

In this metric notation of linguists, the first grid-row of x's represents the four stressed beats; the second row represents isochronous ('same-timed') intervals. In my own notations below, I prefer to use the numbers 1,2,3,4, to represent stressed beats, with small dashes in between to represent isochronous half-beats.[\[17\]](#)

The ubiquity of binary and symmetrical 'lines', usually of 8 beats, in children's rhymes, led Brailoiu (1984) to propose their cultural universality and to formulate a series of rules which these structures obeyed across different languages. In my own work, I have been interested in the way the rhythms of rock music adopt and adapt 'children's rhythms' (Bradby, 2002; 2016 in press). But I am also interested more generally in how the social ubiquity of children's rhythms in the learning of a child's first language set up an *expectation* of such rhythms in subsequent verse and other social activity.[\[18\]](#) Perhaps unsurprisingly, expectations theory in music has focussed predominantly on melody and harmony since Meyer's *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Meyer, 1961; Huron, 2006). Nevertheless, Meyer's theory that musical meaning is found in the way it engages with the listener's expectations, and the emotions that its fulfilling or frustrating of these expectations generates in the listener, can well be extended to rhythm in general and to rap music in particular.

Take, for example, the lines in Sir Mix-a-Lot's 1992 'Baby Got Back', from which the opening voice of 'Anaconda' is sampled. In Example 1, I present my own rhythmic transcription of a section of his rap surrounding the sample. This represents four lines of the online lyrics: I have taken the words from an online site[\[19\]](#) and kept the capitalisation that indicates the line breaks as the lyrics are written out there. I have transcribed the lyrics as eight lines of what may be understood variously as 8 fairly equal beats, as 4 beats subdivided by half-beats, or at times, as 8 half-beats beats subdivided into quarter-beats. I have used different sized fonts to differentiate the different lengths of the rapped words (larger = longer and is here a good stand-in for emphasis). I have inserted a numbered, rhythmic grid above the lines with half-beats indicated by a ` . My own line numbers are inserted to the left of the verse, for ease of reference in the analysis that follows.[\[20\]](#)

Example 1. Transcription of four lines of online lyrics of Sir Mix-a-Lot, 'Baby Got Back' (1992)

	1		2		3		4	
								So your
1.	girl	friend	rolls	a	Hon		da,	play in'
2.	work	out	tapes	by	Fon		da	But
3.	Fon	da	ain't	got a	mo tor	in the	back of	her
4.	Hon		da	My	an	a	con	da
5.	don't		want		none	Un	less	you've
6.	got		buns,		hun			You can
7.	do	side	bends	or	sit-ups,			But
8.	please	don't	lose	that	butt			

Here, the beginning of the section sets up an expectation of chanted 'children's rhythms', and this is resumed again in lines 7-8 (and beyond). However, this regular, binary rhythm is disrupted between lines 3 and 6, where firstly there is a speeding up of the delivery (line 3), then the mid-line commencement of the 'My anaconda' phrase (at beat 2½ of line 4). The phrase continues in an irregular way that does not fit with the symmetry of the other lines, until it ends on an elongated syllable on beat 3 of line 6. Crucially, the phrase as a whole violates one of the basic rules of 'children's rhythms' which is that an anacrusis must be compensated by an equal-length gap at the end of the line (see Brailoiu, 1984). The lines as delineated in the online lyrics (here discernible as words starting with capital letters) also start and finish at irregular places –the 'My' of 'My anaconda' comes on beat 2½ of line 4, the 'Un' of 'Unless' at line 5 occurs on beat 3½, while the emphasised final 'hun' (short for 'honey') at line 6 occurs on beat 3. The overall effect is that of elongating the whole two lines over 10 beats (judging the syllable 'hun' as one beat, and a half-beat 'gap' after it.) Clearly, a 10-beat phrase does not sit easily in the surrounding structure of 4 beat lines. I would add that as a listener, I found it almost impossible to work out in my head the way this phrase (My anaconda...) fitted with the rhythms of the surrounding lines until I wrote it down as in Example 1.

This analysis of the transcribed section, with its talk of 'disruptions' and 'irregularity' is clearly working with some sort of expectation of how a rhyme of chanted 'children's rhythms' should go. If we pursue this in more detail, it seems clear that the repeated rhythm in lines 1 and 2, as they unfold to the listener, is close to that of nursery-rhyme lines such as 'I had a little nut tree' or 'Goosey, goosey gander'.^[21] However, if we say that this sets up an expectation that the binary and symmetrical rhythms will be continued, and that the song then plays with this expectation by thwarting it or distorting the symmetry, we cannot then say with any precision how the lines might have been continued. In certain contexts, repetition of rhythm sets up an expectation of further repetition; in others, repetition sets up

an expectation of change (Cooper and Meyer, 1963: 64). If we look at the two nursery rhymes cited above, the first, 'I had a little nut tree', is in ABAB form (with the B lines shortened by one beat); the second, 'Goosey goosey gander', while lacking the anacrusis, has lines in AABA form, where the identical rhythms across the first two lines parallel those in lines 1 and 2 of Mix-a-Lot's rap (Example 1). In both of these nursery rhymes, there is a rhythmic change between lines 2 and 3 (see Example 2), with the AABA form perhaps setting up the stronger 'expectation' of change in line 3, because of its repetition of the identical rhythm in lines 1 and 2. However, in both cases the rhythmic change at line 3 involves filling in what had been a 'gap' or absent beat at the end of the previous line, the effect being of the filling out of the length of the line. A similar effect is achieved in line 3 of 'Lucy Locket', where the anacrusis means that line 3 effectively starts at the end of line 2, and where the gap in the middle of line 2 after 'found' is 'filled in' at line 3 – the effect is of a continuous flow or patter across the whole of line 3. This, I suggest, is relevant to thinking about the rhythmic change at line 3 of Mix-a-Lot's rap in Example 1, where line 2 had a similar 'gap' after the syllable 'Fond', and line 3 again fills this out and so fills the whole line.

Example 2. Rhythmic change at line 3 of some 4-line nursery rhymes

1	2	3	4
2. Noth ing	would it	bear	
3. But a	sil ver	nut	meg
2. Whi ther	shall I	wan	der
3. Up	stairs and	down	stairs and
2. Kit ty	Fish er	found	it But
3. not a	pen ny	was there	in it

These examples and the analysis so far are intended to demonstrate that the 'children's rhythms' of lines 1 and 2 of Mix-a-Lot's rap at Example 1 set up a musical 'expectation' of the sort of change one hears at line 3 of many nursery rhymes; and that this is indeed the case in his actual delivery. However, we can note also that there is a kind of hyperbole in the filling-out and speeding-up that occurs at Mix-a-Lot's line 3, particularly on the words 'ain't got a motor in the back of her (Hon)'. And for comparison, I have written out a re-arrangement of the words of the first 4 lines in strict children's rhythms, eliminating this 'speeding-up' and showing how the words *could have* been delivered as children's rhythms.

Example 3. Re-arrangement of first 4 lines of Example 1 as 'predictable' children's rhythms

	1	'	2	'	3	'	4	'
								So your
1.	girl	friend	rolls	a	Hon		da,	play in'
2.	work	out	tapes	by	Fon		da	But
3.	Fon	da	ain't	got a	mo		tor	in the
4.	back	of	her		Hon		da	

However, we must here note that the equal stress of the third and fourth beats across all four lines in this re-setting, while obeying the rules of 'children's rhythms', is *not* found in actual nursery rhymes such as 'Lucy Locket', with its running rhythm at line 3 that fills all 8 (half-)beats[22] of the line. In this and other nursery rhymes, the running third line appears to develop the meaning of the lyric, indeed containing the 'point' of it. We can then say that the actual delivery of the rap as in Example 1, with the doubling in speed between beats 2½ and 4 of line 3, plays with and exaggerates the 'expected' rhythm of line 3 of a nursery rhyme. By contrast, my setting in Example 3 would feel entirely predictable and mundane, generating the emotion of boredom, perhaps, in Meyer's terms, especially when compared with the excitement generated by the rhythmic disruptions indicated by the different fonts in Example 1. However, if we continued in the same, 'predictable' vein, we would generate eight lines of 'children's rhythms' in such a way that the apparent distortion of line lengths in lines 4-6 of Example 1 (i.e. around the actual words sampled for the Minaj song) would be 'ironed out'.

Example 4. Re-arrangement of Example 1 as 'predictable' children's rhythms, all 8 lines

	1	`	2	`	3	`	4	`
							So your	
1.	girl	friend	rolls	a	Hon		da,	play in'
2.	work	out	tapes	by	Fon		da	But
3.	Fon	da	ain't	got a	mo		tor	in the
4.	back	of	her		Hon		da	My
5.	an	a	con	da	don't	want	none	Un
6.	less	you've	got	buns,	hun			You can
7.	do	side	bends	or	sit-	ups,		But
8.	please	don't	lose	that	butt			

In this re-imagining, it is no longer necessary for the 'My anaconda...' phrase to start on beat 2½ of the line; instead, it simply starts with an anacrusis to the first beat of the next line. If we then compare this imaginary Example 4 with Mix-a-Lot's actual delivery in Example 1, we see how his doubling of the speed of delivery in line 3 is what allows him space (time) to drag out the words in line 5 following 'My anaconda' to a half- speed delivery. This rhythmic 'dragging out' at line 5 also restores the symmetry of the binary rhythms across the

whole eight lines, by balancing out the previous 'speeding up' at line 3; but this is a clear departure from the rules of strict symmetry in children's rhythms as set out by Brailoiu – which, if he is correct, we have all internalised from an early age. This is an example, I argue, of how rap music more generally both recalls and thwarts the expectations of children's rhythms, plays with and indeed 'signifies on' them in Gates's phrase (1988). The effect, then, of the 'signification' is to allow the drawing out and emphasising of the whole phrase ('My anaconda don't want none unless you've got buns hun') within the song as a whole, and more particularly of the three-word phrases, 'don't want none' and 'got buns hun', which become the most emphasised words in the whole section. In the song as a whole, these emphatic three-word phrases on whole-beats 1,2, and 3 of the line, echo the 1,2,3 [gap] emphasis in the repeated 'Oh my gosh' of the white girls in the Intro to the video, so also serving as Mix-a-Lot's defiant and affirmative 'reply' to their crass comments about the black dancer's 'butt'.

Turning now to how Nicki Minaj's song samples the phrase, 'My anaconda don't want none unless you've got buns hun', from Mix-a-Lot's song, what is obvious, but nevertheless striking, is how she cuts off the phrase after the word 'don't' in the first two repetitions:

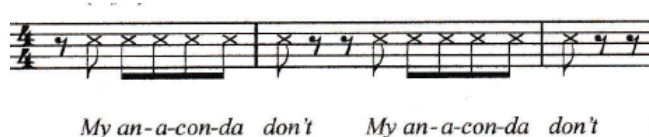
Example 5: *Rhythmic transcription of sample of Sir Mix-a-Lot's voice in Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda', Introduction*

	1	2	3	4	
1.		My	An	a	con da
2.	don't	My	An	a	con da
3.	don't	My	An	a	con da
4.	don't	want	none	un-	less you
5.	got	buns	hun		

In Example 5, I have used the same scheme of font-sizes as in Example 1. Interestingly, the official sheet music (see Example 6) depicts each occurrence of 'don't' on a single quaver; however, online lyric-sites transcribe 'don't' as 'don't...' i.e. with ellipsis afterwards which could indicate *either* continuation of the word in time *or* the omission of the next word in the original phrase ('want'). My sense is that both the sheet music and the lyric-sites are correct, in that together they convey something special about the performance of the word, which is at once emphasised through a somewhat staccato delivery (or 'clipped' in ordinary language), while also occupying the full 1½ beats in time (i.e. the two quaver beats depicted as rests in Example 6). This effect is brought about by an arrangement of the sample, that is, through technological 'editing' of the original delivery in Sir Mix-a-Lot's rap. The sample is therefore *not simply a repetition of the original*, but is transformed semiotically through the

material arrangement of the sounds in such a way as to change the meaning of the original language. The semiotic effect of this sampling arrangement/performance is that of at once pronouncing an exaggerated sexuality ('anaconda') and then denying it with the emphatic 'don't'. The phrase is enigmatic and could mean many things; but it includes at least the two possibilities – that 'don't' is short for 'does not', which could then be an assertion of prodigious sexuality which is not available to others, or that 'don't' is short for the imperative form, 'do not', in which case we have the assertion and its prohibition. Both are forms of contradiction – 'saying the opposite'.

Example 6. Sheet music depiction of vocal sample as arranged in Intro to 'Anaconda'^[23]



Lest it should be thought that this is some coincidental effect of the sampling, it is worth spelling out that there would have been musical space enough to repeat the *four* words, 'My Anaconda don't want', within the repetition framework of the sample (which itself mimics the hip hop DJ's 'scratching' of records to loop a phrase over and over). In a sense this would have been the most natural possibility within the rhythmic flow of the original. We would thus have had:

Example 7: Showing how more words could have been included in 'Anaconda' from Sir Mix-a-Lot's rap

	1	2	3	4	
1.			My	An	a con da
2.	don't	want	My	An	a con da
3.	don't	want	My	An	a con da
4.	don't	want		none	un-less you
5.	got	buns		hun	

The fact that the word 'want' is omitted from the phrase, and we have instead the gap shown clearly in the sheet music, expands the *meaning* of 'don't' from a third person verb ('does not'), auxiliary to 'want' in the original, to that (also) of an imperative verb, or command/prohibition in the sample arrangement ('do not!').

The semiotic effect of the sampling arrangement is therefore to introduce a *prohibition*, which immediately contradicts the sense of the original, where the metaphor of the anaconda snake jokingly implies an enormous sexual organ and appetite. As the joke is appropriated into Minaj's song, she herself becomes associated with the huge sexual appetite, but in a way that is contradictory, since its mention is immediately denied or

prohibited with the emphatic 'don't'. My own work on women's popular music identified negative words such as 'don't' and 'no, (no, no)' as key to the expression of contradictory fantasies of desire and its negation, particularly in relation to 1960s girl-group music, where I wrote about 'Do-talk and Don't-talk' (Bradby 1990). It is striking that a song like 'Anaconda' that was seen by many as pushing the boundaries of acceptable female sexual expression well into the 21st century when it was a major chart hit in 2014,[24] so clearly pronounces the same contradictions.

The cutting short of Mix-a-Lot's phrase in its sampling in 'Anaconda' invites another series of comparisons with nursery-rhyme rhythms, which will demonstrate how close the sample is to well-known children's rhythms, giving empirical basis to the theory of the generation of an 'expectation' of a certain kind of line 3. Since the phrase as it occurs in 'Anaconda' is sampled without the preceding lines of Sir Mix-a-Lot's rap, the 'dragging out' of the second half of the phrase does not occur in some sort of counterpoint with a 'speeding up' of the delivery in the previous lines, as we saw in the discussion of Example 1. To the listener, then, the irregular and asymmetrical rhythm is especially puzzling, and difficult to parse without writing down. To understand how it can again be understood, however, as a 'dragging out' of the typical line 3 of an AABA nursery rhyme, I first of all re-arrange it as strict 'children's rhythms', and then quote a few examples of nursery rhymes as comparison, which between them exemplify most of the characteristics of the rhythm as 'sampled'/re-arranged in 'Anaconda' (Example 8). And in this context, it is difficult to ignore the way in which these apparently innocent rhymes produce a variegated array of metaphors for penile erection and flop, with their repeated narratives of 'up and down'.

Example 8. Re-arrangement of the opening 'sample' in 'Anaconda' as children's rhythms, followed by various nursery rhymes for rhythmic comparison

1	2	3	4			
An	a	con	da	don't		My
An	a	con	da	don't		My
An	a	con	da	don't	want	My
less	you	got	buns	hun	none	un-
grand had marched marched	old ten them them	Duke thous- up down	of and to the a-	York men top gain	of the	hill
Cock dame mas- knows	a has ter's not	doo lost lost what	dle her his to	doo shoe fidd- do	ling	stick
Hick mouse clock Hick	ory ran struck ory	dick up one dick	ory the the ory	dock clock mouse dock	ran	down
						The He He And he
						My My And
						The The

As with the comparisons between Sir Mix-a-Lot's actual delivery and a re-arrangement as 'children's rhythms, we can see how the actual performance of the sample (Example 5) thwarts the expectation of some such running patter in the third line as occurs in the three nursery rhymes in Example 8. The difference in the 'Anaconda' sample is that the shorter lines 1 and 2 with the cut-off after 'don't', make the expected contrast with line 3 of the AABA structure more extreme. That there are several nursery rhymes that make such a line 3 contrast after a cut-off on beat 3 of lines 1 and 2, makes the 'expectation' clearer in the sample than in the original. Another one, again without the anacrusis, so not an exact replica, would be 'Hot cross buns', with its pattering third line, 'One a penny, two a penny' (see below, Example 9).

However, it is the first two lines of 'Hot Cross Buns' that are relevant to thinking about the actual delivery of Example 5, and I make no apology for the pun on 'buns' and the way it is repeated across these different contexts – whether or not Sir Mix-a-Lot or the arrangers of 'Anaconda' had any inkling of the rhythm of 'Hot Cross Buns' is not the point, so much as the way in which adult sexuality works more generally by transforming the language of childhood, learnt in rhymes such as this. I here include a rhythmic transcription of 'Hot Cross Buns' followed by all the phrases in 'Anaconda' which parallel its emphatic, 1,2,3,(gap) rhythm.

Example 9. Rhythm of 'Hot Cross Buns', followed by the phrases in 'Anaconda' which parallel its main rhythm

	1		2		3		4	
1.	Hot		cross		buns			
2.	Hot		cross		buns			
3.	One	a	pen	ny	Two	a	pen	ny
4.	Hot		cross		buns			
	Don't		want		none			
	Got		buns		hun			
	Oh		my		gosh			
	Real		real		real			
	Bang		bang		bang			

The rhythm of lines 1 and 2 of 'Hot Cross Buns' provides an exact parallel, then, for the actual delivery of the emphasised words in lines 4 and 5 of Example 5. As already pointed out, in relation to Sir Mix-a-Lot's original, the emphasising through 'drawing out' of 'don't want none' and 'got buns hun' on the first three beats of a four-beat 'bar' is in some sort of dialogue with the introductory quotation in his song of the white girls saying 'Oh my gosh (look at her butt)'. The difference is that in 'Anaconda', the order is reversed, with 'Oh my gosh, etc' occurring as a chorus some way into the song, and 'don't want none' etc. coming in the Introduction. In this way, the *negative* precedes the positive exclamation about the 'butt' in 'Anaconda'.

A series of phrases in the verses of 'Anaconda' also echo the 1,2,3 rhythm set up in this way in the Introduction ('Real, real, real', in verse 1, and 'Bang, bang, bang' in verse 2). The significance of these is the way in which they introduce the 'gangsta' metaphors of death and killing into a female-performed rap. The second one is fairly obvious, where 'bang, bang' is an everyday shorthand for gunshot, with the double meaning of sex – the second verse being full of sexual slang and double entendre. The first occurrence is more complex, with a dense array of metaphors being set out in the lines following 'real, real, real':

Example 10. 'Anaconda', rhythmic transcription of 3 lines of online lyrics, verse 1

	1	'	2	'	3	'	4	'
13.	kee	ping	me	sty	lish	Now	that's	
14.	real		real		real....		
15.		Gun	in	my	purse		bitch	I
16.	came		dressed to		kill.....		
17.		Who	wanna go		first	I	had	em
18.	push	ing	daf	fo	dils....		

In Example 10, the line numbers are from my own transcription of the whole song. What follows is my own interpretation of these lines, but I am indebted to the humorous 'hip hop translation' by 'Special K' on the Rickey Smiley radio show,[25] for pointing up the reference to rap 'battles', or as he puts it ('translating' Minaj's voice at lines 17-18), 'Anyone willing to challenge my rap skills must know that I lyrically killed off earlier competitors' (the humour residing in the polite and formal language used in the 'translation'). Within this overall metaphor of the rap battle, and the boasting of lyrical skill, there is also a further, phallic metaphor around sexual prowess, starting with the 'gun in my purse' at line 15, a boast addressed to a(nother) (talking) woman ('bitch'). The use of 'dressed to kill' in line 16 is an upending of the way the metaphor is more usually used of a woman to mean 'looking good' in the sense of ability to make sexual conquests through looks. The upending consists in placing this in a context of metaphors about actual killing and death. 'Who wanna go first?' (literally, an invitation to be shot) can refer to the contest of rapping skill at a battle, but in the sexual double entendre, it suggests an invitation to multiple sexual partners.[26] And this goes straight into the 'death' implications of 'pushing daffodils', which I understand by analogy with the commoner, 'pushing daisies', (meaning 'dead' because buried underground). The Urban Dictionary lists 'pushing flowers' as another phrase meaning 'dead', but as with many uses of 'dead' in English, it can mean 'tired' or 'exhausted', as well as literally dead.[27] In the sexual context, then, the meaning is of the singer/boaster exhausting her sexual partners and rendering them 'dead'. Minaj further positions herself as a drug 'lord' or 'baron' (again, it is difficult to find English words that are not heavily gendered

male) in the additional meaning of 'pushing' as selling drugs, – with the next line proclaiming, 'I'm high as hell', and the rhyme with 'daffodil' being 'pill'. 'Daffodil' is also a slang word for Modafinil, or Provigil, (both ending in 'il'), a prescription drug that decreases fatigue.[28]

If, together, the thickly-layered metaphors amount to a rap boast of sexual prowess and incredible stamina, it is also a boast that is gendered at once 'phallic', but also made from the female point of view. This is indeed the boast of a 'phallic girl'. As an imaginary piece of talk, these lines serve as a Sacks-ian, conversational 'story' that validates the 'claim' of 'real, real, real' made at line 14, a phrase which serves as a preface to the overall boast, and which is 'translated' by Special K as 'This is no exaggeration'. Rhythmically, the association is with the words evoked by what I have dubbed the 1,2,3 rhythm, namely the 'don't want none' etc. of the introductory sample, a phrase which, I have argued, is itself a reply to the 'Oh my gosh' of the white girls' talk that introduced Sir Mix-a-Lot's song. The repeated, emphatic rhythm sets up a chain of associations/replies that are also transformations of meaning. We could say that if Mix-a-Lot's 'Don't want none' is a 'reply' to the white girls' 'Oh my gosh' talk, then Minaj's 'Real, real, real' boast is her own 'reply' to Sir Mix-a-Lot, but in particular to the white girls' talk about black bodies that was the jumping-off point for his rap.

In my analysis of Buddy Holly's song 'Oh Boy!' (Bradby, 2002), I showed how the echoing chorus recalled the steady voice of chanted, 'children's rhythms', while at the same time, fusing this with the 'adult' rhythms of the 'Bo Diddley' beat. The chorus's use of 'nonsense' syllables (dum de dum dum) enhances this evocation of the nursery rhyme register. It also suggests actual words from the lyrics of the lead singer's verses that are sung to the precise rhythm of 'dum de dum dum', which I called 'imaginary lyrics', evoking also the Lacanian concept of the imaginary as the material trace of the mother (in this case her voice).

As it happens 'Dun duh duh dun dun, duh duh dun dun' is a line that occurs at the end of each repetition of the 'pre-chorus' in Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda', variously written as 'Dun d d dun dun, d d dun dun' in online lyrics sites. The 'pre-chorus' is preceded by the line, 'I'm on some dumb shit', and we could see this 'dum' syllable as referring both backwards to nursery-rhyme language and forwards to the 'Dun d d dun dun' at the end of the pre-chorus. My own rhythmic transcription of the pre-chorus (including one line before and after it) is as follows:

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Example 11. Rhythmic transcription of the 'pre-chorus' of 'Anaconda'

	1	2	3	4	
		I'm	on	some	dumb {shit
					{pa pa pa pa
1.	pa pa	By the	way,	HEY	what he say? HEY
2.		He can	tell I	ain't	missing no meals HEY
3.	Come	thru 'n'	fuck 'em	in my	auto mo bile Let him/HEY
4.	eat it	with his	grills	He keep	tellin me to chill He keep/HEY
5.	tell ing	me its	real	that he	love my sex ap peal That/HEY
6.	he don't	like em	bo ney	he want	somethin he can grab So I/HEY
7.	pulled up	in the	Jag	and I	hit 'em with the jab Like/HEY
8.	{dun	duh duh	dun	dun/HEY	duh duh dun dun HEY
	{		My	An	a con da

Notes to Example 11:

- i. The upper- and lower-case regular typeface represents the voice of the lead singer (rapper), Nicki Minaj. The words in upper-case only ('HEY') are voiced by a chorus.
- ii. Bold type indicates the sampled voice of Sir Mix-a-Lot.
- iii. Two different sizes of font were used throughout the transcription to make it clear that some lines contain more syllables, hence come across as 'double-speed' rapping in comparison with the 'slower' lines. In practice, when transcribing, it is difficult to fit these 'double-speed' lines into the grid space of the 'slower' ones.
- iv. Where { occurs in consecutive lines, it indicates that the lines are performed simultaneously by different voices
- v. Where / occurs between words, it also indicates simultaneous performance by different voices.
- vi. I have kept the capitalisation indicating the beginning of a line from printed versions of the lyrics, even though in the main, this does not coincide with the beginning of numbered lines above, because of the anacrusis.

Before going any further with the analysis, it is necessary to discuss the ambiguous 'em' or 'im' at line 3. In several online versions of the lyrics, this is written as 'him'. However, the sheet music has it as 'em' in both cases, the abbreviated form of 'them'. My own hearing in first transcribing the lyric at line 3, was of 'em', even though my attempt to make sense of the line would have liked it to be 'im'. A further consideration is that while 'them' usually refers to plural persons, it can also be used as a substitute for a singular third person, particularly when the gender of the third person is not known (e.g. 'You could make an appointment with your lecturer and tell them about your problem'). In line 3 above, the sense is doubly difficult to conjecture, since there is no subject for the phrase 'Come through': it could be a command, or it could have 'I', 'he', or 'they' as an absent subject. Since the subject of all the other sentences is 'He', it makes grammatical sense to infer that the official sheet music 'em' is in fact an 'im', which is what seems to have happened in the online posting of lyrics.

I prefer to stay with my initial hearing of 'em', and the ambiguities this creates. I make no claims that my hearing *is* the 'correct' one; simply that the social *performance* (which here extends from the rapper's performance on record to someone's online postings of their own written hearings of the lyrics) contains ambiguities which are suggestive of multiple sexual partners. This makes more sense if seen in the context of the lines of Verse 1 just analysed

that are again *suggestive* of an invitation to multiple sexual partners ('Who wanna go first, I had em pushing daffodils'). The play is with the performance of the 'phallic girl', who is not just playing at being male, but shares male desires and, sometimes cruel, pleasures, while flowing seamlessly into female roles and metaphors in her rap narrative, praising her 'pussy' and engaging in a semblance of 'girl-talk' about ex-boyfriends.

Returning to Example 11, it is possible to use the grid to find unique phrases in the song which have the identical rhythms to the 'Dun d d dun dun' phrases: we can take 'Come through and fuck 'em' from line 3, and 'Ain't missing no meals' from line 2. Putting these together we come up with, 'Come through and fuck em, ain't missing no meals' as the 'imaginary lyrics' behind 'Dun d d dun dun etc.' Such a line would play on the double meanings of 'eating' and 'food' as metaphors for sex. 'Ain't missing no meals', evoked by the rhythms of the second half of the 'Dun d d dun' line, becomes another statement or boast about voracious sexual appetite and multiple partners (not just a boast about the curves of her body), as seen through the admiring eyes of the boyfriends whose stories she tells in the two verses that precede the repetitions of this pre-chorus.

Here the nursery-rhyme, nonsense syllables are transformed into the boasts and desires of the 'phallic girl'. This is not a literal writing of desire, but one that is revealed through the material semiotic of rhythm, its repetition, and the associations and expectations this sets up. The eyes of the boyfriend ('he can see that I' are the words that precede 'ain't missing no meals') are admiring, rather than objectifying. The phallic girl appropriates the boasts of rap to her own sexual aggrandisement. But the original phallic boast of Sir Mix-a-Lot is not indiscriminate, but socially located within the history of racialised 'black/white' distinctions in the USA and the Atlantic world. His boast, while exuding sexual confidence in conjunction with the 'bros', i.e. with other black men, also itself contains a denial ('My anaconda don't want...'), which effectively places racial boundaries around his sexual desire – he is endorsing desire for the black female body with 'buns', and excluding desire for the 'beanpole dames of the magazines', who are stereotypically white (a refusal which is in line with his rhythmic echo of the white girls' talk in his 'don't want none' reply). In a sense, this black male statement, then, denies an uncontrolled, promiscuous desire, and advocates for a socially channelled, racialised desire. This social statement does not happen in a vacuum, of course, but is battling what he sees as the huge, social power of the capitalist advertising industry, with its consumerist promotion of a normalised, thin, bum-free body (and, as many others have pointed out, its explicit and implicit denigration of anything different, which is labelled 'fat' and associated with uncontrolled impulses, which in turn are actively associated with social classes and 'races' that are seen as inferior). It is within this social-political

context that Mix-a-Lot advocates for black men to value/desire black female bodies in this way.

When Nicki Minaj takes up his call and his song, she increases the emphasis on the 'don't', and by divorcing it from the 'want' that follows it in the original rap, makes it less, or not only, a denial of *desiring* the thin, white norm, and more, or also, a prohibition on the availability of her prodigious, phallic sexuality ('anaconda'). By 'availability', I here mean more than her not making herself sexually 'available' passively or indiscriminately, but something closer to 'open to objectification'. This is the nub of my analysis of where the contradictory 'don't-talk' of female pop has been taken to in this song. In the opening lyrics, we already have, in a nutshell, the core of the feminist upholding of this song (nearly always based on analysis of the visuals in the video, e.g. Zoladz, 2014). Minaj is glorying in her own sexual magnetism and beauty, but she is denying/prohibiting its objectification in the eyes of the beholder. My argument is that this message is derived from the meaning that the lyrics (words rhythmically arranged in musical 'rap') give to the visuals, not (or not only) from a reading of the visuals as a silent film.

The enormous emphasis given to the 'don't' in this song comes from its musical/technological arrangement in the sample of the original, which is here transformed into a major prohibition on desire that colours the rest of the song. In this context, the white girls' talk, repeated over and over again in 'Anaconda' and mixed in with other elements from Mix-a-Lot's song, becomes a meaningless repetition of syllables, similar to the repetition of 'hot cross buns' in the nursery rhyme. The analysis in this paper has attempted to show how the use of, and allusions to 'children's rhythms' in rap music generally, can be given very particular inflections by close analysis of actual examples. The pleasures of such binary rhythms are very widespread, if not universal, across different cultures. As the rhythms of small children, and of adults' interactions with babies and small children, they are some of the most widely-shared and apparently 'simple' pleasures of life, and are associated with our own earliest memories and first learning of language, as well as with our teaching of language to infants. In this context, it is relevant to propose a theory of musical expectations, where rap music is able to play with, affirm and thwart the expectations that 'children's rhythms' set up in our minds/bodies. This song takes over some of the ways in which rhythmic expectations are set up and played with in the Mix-a-Lot rap; but it also transforms them in the ways shown, crucially with the emphatic cut-off after 'don't' and the semiotic shift in its meaning to encompass, as argued, a social prohibition on the objectification of the black, female body. As 'phallic girl', she/her body glories in and glorifies its/her own sexuality. This is socially contextualised in the racialised world we live in where 'black' signifies negatively, but is also appropriated and envied, whether as 'cool', or as 'gangsta'. Minaj

adds something to this, which is a brazen, female dimension that attacks and appropriates the stereotypes of black female sexuality head-on. She assumes the phallus effortlessly, but she is also savvy about the social context in which she does so. Her racial message is never voiced aloud, unlike that of Mix-a-lot: it is implicit in the visuals, where the dancers are predominantly black or made to look so by the lighting – though there is a nod to non-racism in the inclusion of one dancer who looks 'white', indeed the dancing team looks to embody some of McRobbie's themes of the 'global girl' (McRobbie, 2009: 87ff.) Minaj carries on the tradition of strong, female singers who use negative prohibitions like 'don't' and 'No (no no)' in their lyrics to indicate 'non-availability'. But she gives this prohibition new meaning in the context of acting out an abundant sexuality that is based on everyday relationships rather than some romantic ideal of 'love'.

Endnotes

- 1 Alicia Lut1 Alicia Lutes: "Here's Miley Cyrus Riding an Inflatable Penis On Stage Because Of Course", on: MTV.com, 5.10.2014, URL: <http://www.mtv.com/news/1823027/heres-miley-cyrus-riding-an-inflatable-penis-on-stage-because-of-course/> (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 2 Cavan Sieczkowski: "Miley Cyrus On Lesbian Rumors: 'I'm Not Offended'", on: huffingtonpost.com, 18.7.2013, URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/18/miley-cyrus-lesbian-rumors_n_3616287.html (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 3 David Mikkelson: "Bluffin' with her Muffin? Contrary to online rumor, pop star Lady Gaga is not an 'hermaphrodite.'", on: snopes.com, 7.2.2016, URL: <http://www.snopes.com/music/artists/ladygaga.asp> (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 4 Some of Peaches' song titles which invoke the penis are 'Hot Rod' (2002), 'Shake Yer Dix' (2003), 'Slippery Dick', 'Tent in Your Pants (2006), 'Dick in the Air' (2015).
- 5 The interview in *Rhino Review* is quoted on the Wikipedia page for Peaches, but the original is no longer available. My quotations are from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peaches_%28musician%29 (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 6 A friend who lives in Latin America told me of the expression, used by a gay man, 'Soy anaconda, porque me como un hombre', (literally, 'I am an anaconda, because I eat up a man'). Here the anaconda signifies oral sex, which is perhaps truer to the habits of actual anacondas, who are known for their ability to swallow and digest larger animals.
- 7 Irkited; "Worst Songs – Nicki Minaj Anaconda", on: Irkited.com, (no date), URL: <http://www.irkited.com/2014/09/worst-songs-nicki-minaj-anaconda.html> (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 8 Carmen, 'Nicki Minaj's Feminism Isn't About Your Comfort Zone: On "Anaconda" and Respectability Politics', on Autostraddle.com, 25.8.2014, URL: <http://www.autostraddle.com/nicki-minajs-feminism-isnt-about-your-comfort-zone-on-anaconda-and-respectability-politics-251866/> (last accessed on 27.7.2016)
- 9 The syllable 'Kyuh!' is taken from the predominant transcription of this line on online lyrics sites. (It occurs with identical spelling and exclamation mark on 5 out of 9 sites that I looked at.) It is absent from the official sheet music, and from some online sites where it is clear that the lyrics were posted *before* the song's release, suggesting that the syllable was added in performance.
- 10 Video stills taken from 'Nicki Minaj – Anaconda', uploaded to NickiMinajatVEVO site on Youtube, August 19, 2014, viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs> along with 597,970,258 other views at time of writing (last accessed 18/06/2016).
- 11 Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JphDdGV2TU> (last accessed 22/07/2016)
- 12 Hawkins' assessment of the video is similarly positive, though he locates the meaning of the video in its 'intertextuality': 'The referencing of the 'Baby Got Back' video (...) not only destabilizes the male gaze, but also reclaims the norms of beauty associated with weight, size, shape, and skin colour. That Minaj flaunts a sexuality that is antithetical to the white girls in 'Baby Got Back' circumvents many of the structures of patriarchy to which females are subjected. Basically, during the performance she slams racism, misogyny, and sexual prejudice.' (Hawkins, 2016: 118)

13 An internet search will bring up many 'lists' of the top Booty songs.

14 One of the best sources on this episode in Irish cultural history is the RTE documentary, 'Down With Jazz', first broadcast in 1987, and still available at <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2009/0621/646072-jazz/>

15 The concept of 'naturally occurring' conversation comes from Conversation Analysis (Sacks 1995). The critique of interview method is a foundational tenet of CA, but see for instance the elaboration in Chapter 4 of Silverman (2001).

16 Hawkins' analysis of 'Anaconda' (2016: 115-123) is an exception to this, and I am indebted to his pointing out the way in which the repeated bass riff, sampled from Sir Mix-a-Lot's 'Baby Got Back', acts as 'a musical metaphor for the anaconda "snake" and the male genital (...).eroticizing the entire track (...) – it feels over-sexed, lascivious and foreboding' (Hawkins, 2016: 118).

17 In this way, I reference the musical conventions of 'common time' (4/4 in written musical notation) whereby beat 1 of a bar expects the strongest stress, beat 3, a slightly lesser stress, and beats 2 and 4 being non-stressed. However, the 'dipodic' nature of much binary verse (Attridge 1982: 114ff.) means that the 8 lines of the 'pre-chorus' excerpted below could be construed as 16 lines or 32 lines, in each case, with a similar internal 1,2,3,4 structure; or, if construed according to Brailoiu's rules, as 32 lines of 8 beats each.

18 Such rhythms are also ubiquitous in the adult activity of political protest 'marching'. However, it is interesting that this is a feature that is brought to life through the collective *chanting* of slogans as live performance, rather than simply the writing of them on banners. Compare, for instance, the written banners at a 2014 Stop the War protest in London, which read, 'Stop bombing Iraq, don't attack Syria', with the report that the crowd were chanting, 'Hands off the Middle East, No justice, no peace'. (Luke McGregor/Reuters, 'Hands off the Middle East: Hundreds rally in London against British airstrikes, on: RT.com, 4.10.2014, URL: <https://www.rt.com/uk/193216-britain-protest-isis-strikes/> (last accessed on 27.7.2016))

19 The online site I used was AZLyrics, (www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sirmixalot/babygotback.html) and last accessed 19/06/2016. That these lyrics are a joint production is shown by the credit to online collaborators at the base of the lyrics page: 'Thanks to Trevor, Charli, funky_baby_blu13, permanentdamage2, pathscrods for correcting these lyrics.' However, AZLyrics states that 'SIR MIX-A-LOT lyrics are property and copyright of their owners. "Baby Got Back" lyrics provided for educational purposes and personal use only.' The online 'preview' of the official sheet music (which I have *not* used) shows that it is entitled 'Baby Got Back', words and music by Anthony L Ray, Copyright 1992, Universal – Polygram International Inc. and Mix-A-Lot Inc.

20 These are my own line divisions. The line divisions of the online lyrics can be deduced from the capitalisation in the Example.

21 The common texts of the three English-language nursery rhymes mentioned in this paragraph are as follows, with accents inserted to indicate the main stressed beats:

22 I have departed from Brailoiu's analysis in using numbers in my transcriptions. Brailoiu himself insists that 'children's rhythms' follow lines of 8 approximately equal beats – this is the 'chanting' effect

where syllables are given equal weight. I have used numbers partly in order to help convey the narrative structure of the lines, and the sense of a new beginning at new lines, e.g. in lines 1,2, 7 and 8 of Example 1, but my own numbered beats and half-beats also imply unevenly stressed syllables. I believe that a rap like Sir Mix-a-Lot's is somewhere between the equally-weighted, chanted beats of 'childrens' rhythms', and the clear stresses of literary poetry.

23 'Anaconda', Words and Music by Ernest Clark, Jamal Jones, Onika Maraj, Jonathan Myvett, Marcos Palacios, and Anthony "Sir Mix-A-Lot" Ray. 2014, Songs of Universal, Inc. Universal Music Publishing Group, purchased online from <http://www.musicnotes.com>

24 'Anaconda' reached no. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 on September 6th, 2014, and was no. 1 on the Billboard Streaming Songs chart, the video having received 32.1 million domestic streams in its first week, the highest since Miley Cyrus's 'Wrecking Ball' received 36.4 million streams in the week ending September 28th, 2013. (data taken from Wikipedia page on 'Anaconda',

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaconda_%28Nicki_Minaj_song%29#Commercial_performance)

25 Special K (2014): "Hip-Hop Translation: Nicki Minaj 'Anaconda'" (Audio) on: Rickey Smiley Morning Show. URL: <http://rickeymileymorningshow.com/1551557/nicki-minaj-anaconda-lyrics/> (last accessed on 27.7.2016)

26 Here we run up against the limitations of language in that there are no words without negative ('nymphomaniac') or disapproving ('whore') connotations in English for a woman who does this. We could note that her invitation is some sort of converse of the 'gang bang', which could be evoked by the 'bang, bang, bang' of verse 2, and which occurs in the midst of piled-on sexual metaphors and slang.

27 UrbanDictionary.com: Entry on "Pushing Flowers", URL: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=pushing+flowers> (last accessed on 27.7.2016).

28 UrbanDictionary.com: Entry on "Daffodils", URL: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Daffodil&defid=3689630> (last accessed on 27.7.2016). However, 'Special K' 'translates' this as 'I am intoxicated courtesy of half a Molly pill', i.e. ecstasy.

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Discography

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